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Ag in the Classroom

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Votes

A bi-monthly newsletter for the Agriculture in the Classroom Program. Sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture to help students understand the important role of agriculture in the United States economy. For information, contact the AITC Director, Room 4307, South Bldg., USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250-0991. 202/720-7925.

Agricultural Calendars Provide Year-Round Reminder of the Importance of Agriculture

There are certain basics found in virtually every classroom: a chalkboard, a flag, a photocopy of the lunch menu, and a calendar. Calendars produced by state AITC organizations and an agricultural organization are helping provide a year-round reminder to teachers and students of the importance of agriculture.

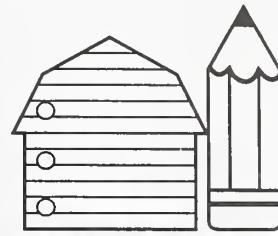
The Oklahoma AITC program was looking for a way to remind students that it's impossible to have an ag-less day, so the idea of producing a calendar was a natural. "A calendar is something teachers and students will use throughout the year," says Jo Theimer, one of the coordinators of the project and a state contact for AITC in Oklahoma.

The calendar, printed in two colors on recycled paper, features art work by Oklahoma 4-H club members, chosen through a contest that offered \$50 savings bonds to each of the winners. It is also full of the kinds of interesting facts children love. (October 26 is both National Mule Day and the average date of the first frost in eastern Oklahoma.) Teachers can also refer to the calendar to find out which of the lessons in the Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom curriculum relate to the facts presented.

Each month also presents information about some aspect of agriculture—and how agriculture touches children's daily lives. It was funded by a grant from Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, with additional funding from the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture.

Kentucky took a different approach, producing a four-color 24" x 36" poster that features children's

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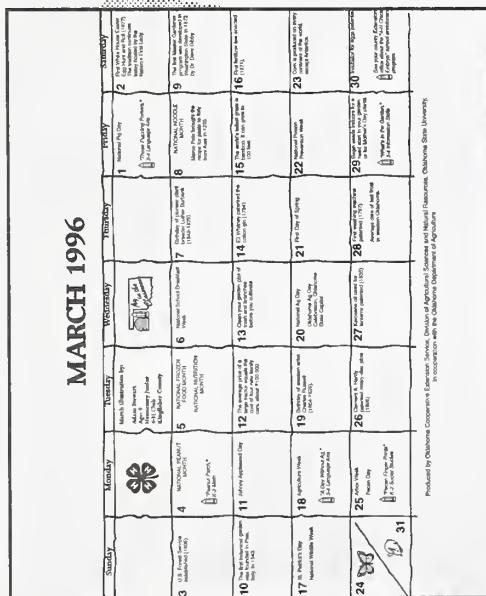


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art on an agricultural theme. Students in the classes of the more than 500 teachers who have attended an Ag in the Classroom workshop are encouraged to submit either pictures or essays (or both) on an agricultural topic.

Winners, along with their parents and teachers, come to the state capital and have lunch at the governor's mansion. "Children can submit a picture, an essay, or both," says Rayetta Boone, state contact for AITC in Kentucky. The essays are published in the back of the state's book of agricultural statistics.

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*Oklahoma school children
can learn about
agriculture throughout the
year, thanks to a calendar
developed by Oklahoma
AITC.*

From the Director:

With this newsletter we begin a new section of Notes called "Agriculture (Ag) on the Internet." Beginning with the 1996 Agriculture Fact Book Internet address, we will include a new Internet address and program description in each issue to alert you to agricultural information available through this new technology.

This month's book corner contains not one but four books by the same author, Jerry Pallotta. While several of these books have been available for a number of years, his latest, *The Spice Alphabet Book*, creates an opportunity to highlight this successful author and his books. Watch next month for his book *Going Lobstering*.

From the lessons on the back of "What Can You Learn from a Cow and a Worm?" the one area you won't learn about is the assistance microbes provide in cellulose digestion in a rumen. While microbial action in decomposition is included, you may want to share with teachers and students that microbes also help ruminants to digest fiber by breaking down cellulose in the rumen.

Please continue to share information with us so that we make this newsletter as useful as possible to our readership.

Elizabeth A. Wolanyk

Elizabeth A. Wolanyk, Director

Poster Shows Students Important Environmental Lessons They Can Learn from a Cow and a Worm

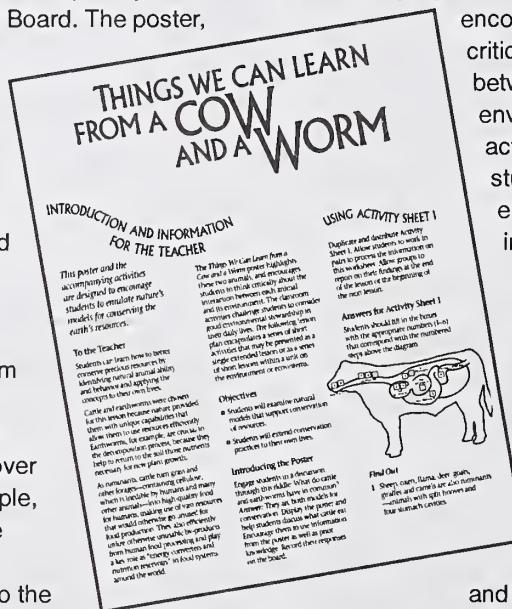
What can students learn from a cow and a worm? Plenty, according to a poster developed by the National Live Stock and Beef Board. The poster, with accompanying activities, is designed to help students learn how to conserve natural resources by identifying animal characteristics and applying lessons from the animal world to their own lives.

"Cattle and earthworms were chosen for this lesson because nature provided them with unique capabilities that allow them to use resources efficiently," said Barbara Selover of the Meat Board. For example, earthworms are crucial to the process of decomposition because they help to return to the soil those nutrients necessary for new plant growth.

Students also learn that cattle are *ruminants*. They have a unique stomach with four compartments, which allows them to eat products other animals cannot digest. Thus, cows make use of many resources that would otherwise go unused for food production.

The *Things We Can Learn from a Cow and a Worm* highlights these two animals and encourages students to think critically about the interaction between each animal and its environment. Classroom activities also encourage students to consider good environmental stewardship in their daily lives.

According to Selover, third and fourth grade teachers who want a copy of the poster may receive one free of charge by writing on school letterhead to their local Beef Council or the National Live Stock



and Meat Board. Other teachers may purchase the poster for \$3.00, which includes shipping and handling. Contact:

National Live Stock and Meat Board
444 North Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60611
Or telephone 1-800-368-3138 and refer to item number 17517.

Spotlight

Spotlight: Nebraska Teacher Harvests Sweet Memories

Students learn to write by writing. Last year, third graders in Lois Herbel's class at Geil Elementary School, Gering, Nebraska, spent the entire year writing an oral history of the people who produce sugar beets in their community. Titled *Sweet Memories*, the book is now part of the permanent collection in local libraries, historical societies, and museums.

The production of sugar beets has directly and indirectly molded the economy, heritage, traditions, and values of Gering. So it was not surprising that when Herbel took the Ag in the Classroom summer workshop, she developed a unit about sugar beet production. It included games, activities, and even a videotape. "Still, I felt something was missing," she says.

At the same time, Herbel says, she became "intrigued" by the stories she heard at family holiday gatherings. Many of the stories described sugar beet production from a personal viewpoint. But there didn't seem to be anywhere these stories had been written down. So Herbel decided that perhaps her class could polish their writing skills, understand that history is what happens to real people—and learn more about the agriculture of their area.

First, students learned how to conduct oral interviews. Then they invited their relatives or people who worked at the school to visit their classroom to tell their stories. "Many of the people we contacted did not think their stories were worthwhile," Herbel recalls. "But after visiting with them, they became convinced they had a tremendous amount of information to offer."

The local newspaper showed students how to write a story from an interview. "Talk about a true business-education partnership!" Herbel says. "Students learned to use different leads in their stories. They learned to look for main idea and supporting details. Their writing and keyboarding skills took on new meaning when they had to use them in a real-life situation."

After all the articles were written, students collected, analyzed, selected, and scanned photographs. Finally, the entire document was printed. The class invited all those who had shared

their stories to a special reception, followed by an autographing session. "A real bond developed between the students and the community," Herbel discovered.

Now the students are learning skills in marketing. They're selling the book and plan to use the proceeds to purchase a computer for their classroom.

Lois Herbel believes a similar project could be repeated "in any community using any theme." Students have the chance to learn outside their classroom—and community members, many of whom may not have come into a school in years, get a chance to see what's going on inside the schoolroom. Best of all, she says, "writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills took on new meaning for the students."

For more information, contact Lois Herbel at Geil Elementary School, 1600 D Street, Gering, Nebraska 69341; 308-436-2545.



Brian Wurtz is interviewing Marion Heilbrun.



Ed Spurgeon demonstrates hand topping of sugar beets with the beef knife.

Materials Available for Soil and Water Stewardship Week

For more than 40 years, local conservation districts have celebrated Soil and Water Stewardship Week between the last Sunday in April and the first Sunday in May (April 28 to May 5, 1996). This year, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) has prepared an educational kit of materials based on the theme "HARMONY: People and Places."

The theme focuses on the importance of individuals and communities working together to create harmony between people and places. As the guide points out, "Webster's first definition of *harmony* does not refer to musical sounds; instead, it talks of agreement, accord, and harmonious relations. Harmony can also be an environmental metaphor—the idea of harmony between people and the natural world we depend on."

"Harmony: People and Places" is the theme for materials developed by the National Association of Conservation Districts to celebrate Soil and Water Stewardship Week.

The educational kit includes a 16-page educators' guide as well as two student activity books. "People, Places and Me in Harmony" is designed for children from preschool through grade 3. "People and Places: Neighbors with Nature" is an eight-page activity guide for grades 4 through 6. The kit also includes two posters, a bookmark, and a place mat. Although the materials are particularly suitable for Soil and Water Stewardship Week, they can be integrated into curriculum throughout the year.

In addition, the group has developed a 12-minute video, "All Things Connected." The video brings to life the words of Chief Seattle as he responded to the offer from the U.S.

government to buy tribal lands during the nineteenth century.

The cost for the education sample kit is \$4.50, which includes postage and handling. Cost of the video is \$16 plus postage. For more information, contact your local conservation district or the NACD Service Center in Texas at 1-800-825-5547.





Alphabet Books Teach More than the ABC's

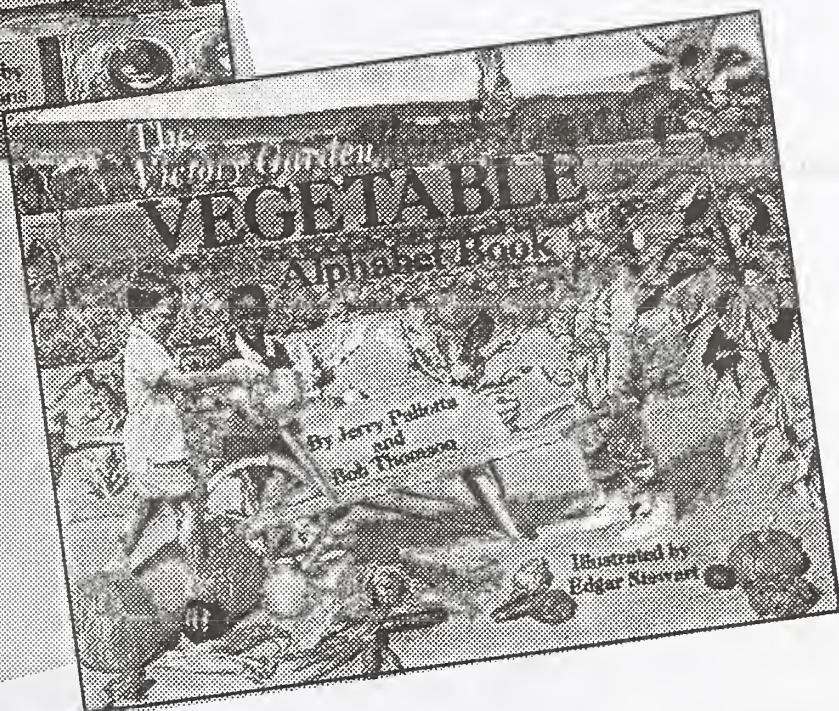
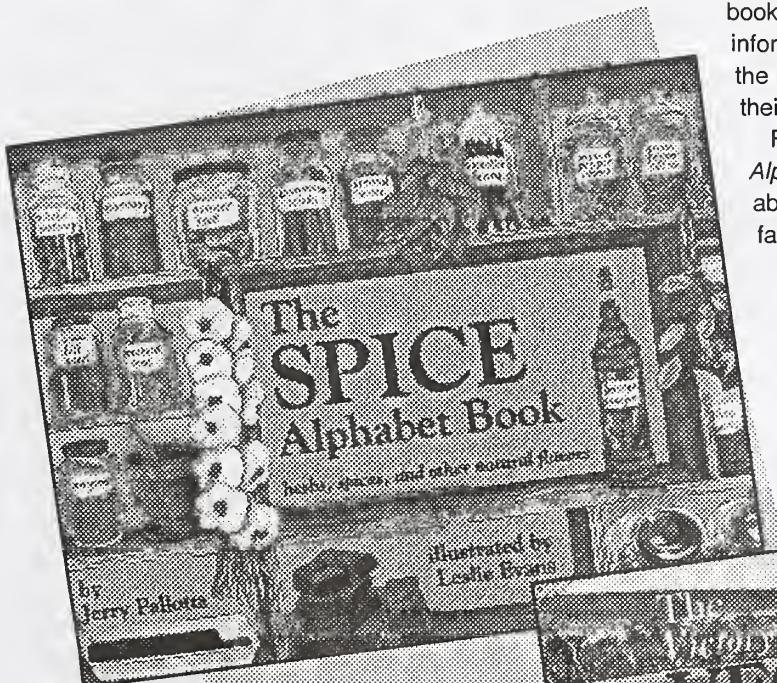
Educators have always tried to teach children a little something extra as they learned their letters. That's why Puritan children learned to recognize the letter A by reciting "In Adam's fall we sinn'd all."

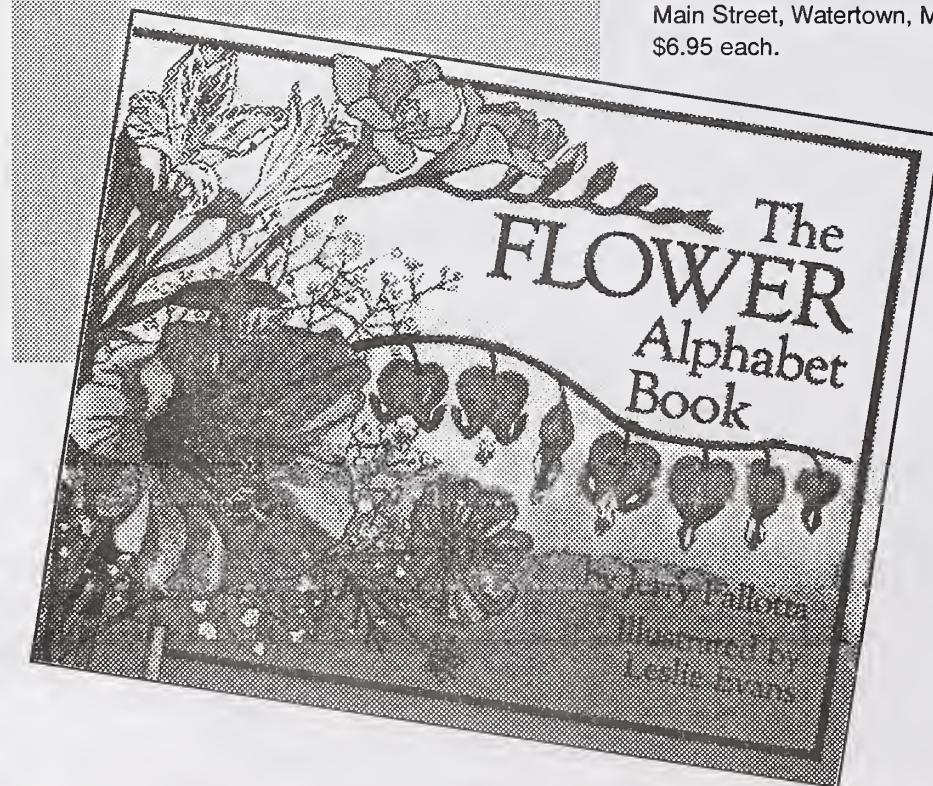
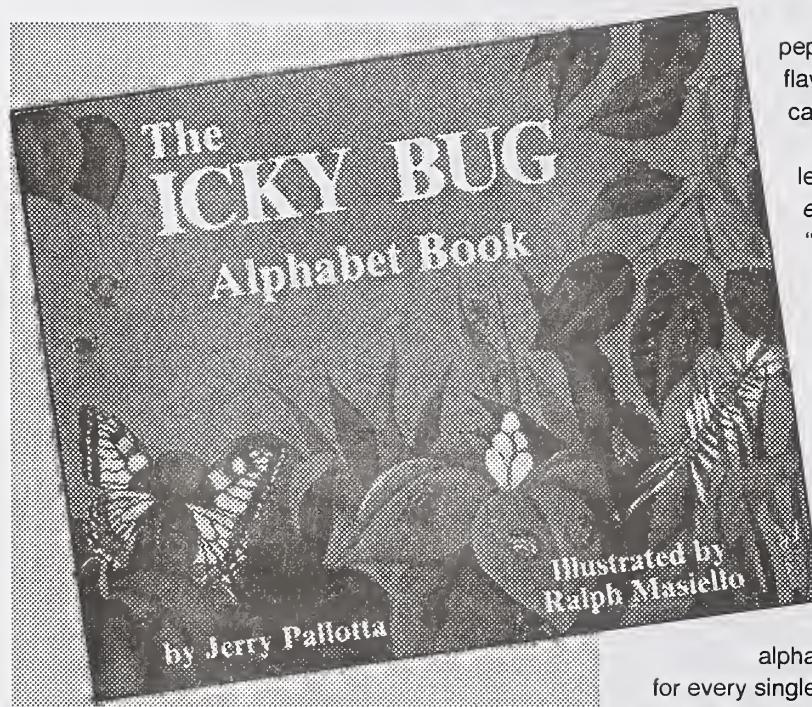
Four books written by Jerry Pallotta take a decidedly more cheery approach. Titled *The Spice Alphabet Book*, *The Victory Garden Vegetable Alphabet Book*, *The Flower Alphabet Book*, and *The Icky Bug Alphabet Book*, these four colorful books help children learn important information about agriculture and the natural world as they also learn their ABC's.

For example, in *The Spice Alphabet Book*, children learn about spearmint, one of their favorite flavors: "Spearmint and

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Students will learn about the world around them as they learn their ABC's with these four books by Jerry Pallotta.





peppermint are aromatic herbs that are used to flavor candy, gum, and toothpaste. It is fun to eat candy, but don't forget to brush your teeth."

Students (and probably their parents) also learn new words. In *The Victory Garden Vegetable Alphabet Book*, X stands for xeriscaping. "Xeriscaping is the art of growing plants with hardly any water. This is a new word and a whole new type of outdoor landscaping and gardening that preserves our precious water."

There's plenty of information in these books, but there's humor, too. In *The Icky Bug Alphabet Book*, Pallotta writes about the Monarch Butterfly, "known for migrating. It flies from the northern United States all the way to Mexico. Birds know that Monarchs taste awful, so they never go near them."

And in *The Flower Alphabet Book*, Pallotta alludes to the difficulty of any alphabet book—the problem of finding an example for every single letter. "U is for Unicorn Root," he writes. "There are not many pretty flowers that begin with the letter U. The Unicorn Root probably got its name from the mythical unicorn horn."

The books are all published by Charlesbridge Publishing, 85 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02172; 617-926-0329. Cost is \$6.95 each.

INTERNET

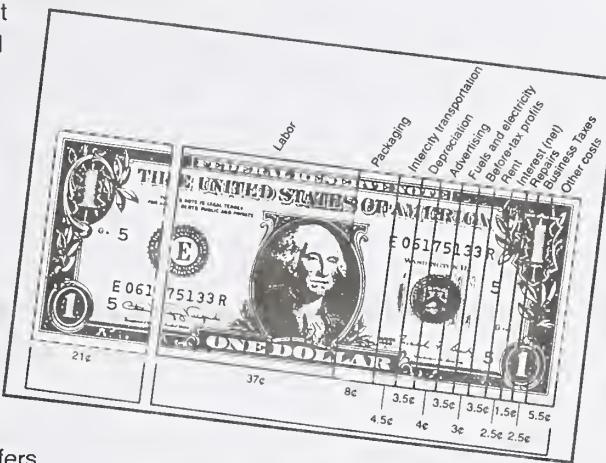
Ag on the Internet: 1996 Fact Book Available Online

Do you want to know how each dollar spent on food was divided up? Are you interested in tracking the per capita consumption of sweeteners in the U.S.? The *Agriculture Fact Book* for 1996 has answers to these and hundreds of other questions.

The book collects basic facts about many aspects of U.S. agriculture. They are especially helpful for students doing research, teachers looking for the most up-to-date information about a particular aspect of agriculture, and for groups interested in farm, consumer, rural development, or environmental issues.

For example, one section of the book offers the latest statistics on what Americans eat—providing evidence that although progress is coming slowly and in "fits and starts," eating habits are gradually becoming more healthy. Accompanying charts show per capita consumption of foods ranging from meat and poultry to fruit juices and bottled water.

Another section of the Fact Book describes programs in USDA's seven mission areas: rural economic and community development; farm and international trade; food, nutrition, and consumer services; food safety; natural resources and environment; science, education, and economics; and marketing and inspection.



The 1996 Agriculture Fact Book shows what a dollar spent on food paid for.

Copies of the Fact Book are available through the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing office, Washington, DC 20402. Cost is \$9.50. You can order by phone (202-512-1800) or by fax (202-512-2250) using Visa or MasterCard. Specify order number 001-000-04623-3. A quantity discount of 25 percent is available on orders of 100 copies or more.

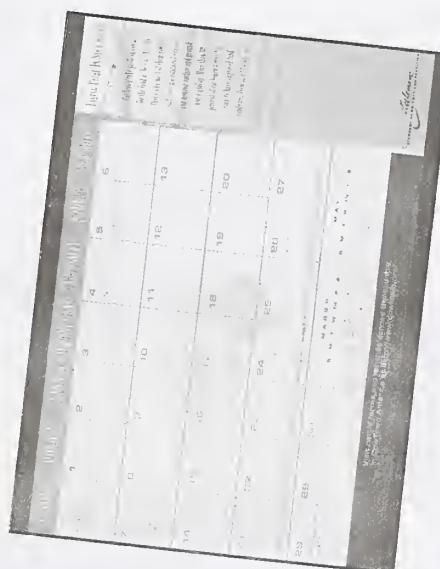
For the first time this year, the 1996 Agriculture Fact Book is available on the Internet. The electronic version can be found at USDA's Home Page on the WorldWide Web. USDA's Internet address is

[HTTP://www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)

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The National Cattlemen's Beef Association and Beef Board has developed a 1996 calendar that highlights environmental stewardship. "Cattlemen Caring for the Environment" is a four-color calendar that features twelve families who have been awarded a regional Environmental Stewardship Award for their work in conserving America's land, water, air, energy, vegetation, and wildlife.

For ordering information, contact the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and Beef Board, P.O. Box 3469, Englewood, CO 80155; 303-694-0305.



Stories about real farm families are featured on this calendar.

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The individuals listed here are key reference persons in each state. If you have any questions, want to make reports, or need more information about your state's Ag in the Classroom program, contact the following:

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